



BACK TO THE BALKANS

Oscar Hemer



In my adolescence in the late '60s and early '70s, Yugoslavia had the international image of a modern nation in the avant-garde of contemporary culture and politics. The Praxis group of philosophers and social scientists (some of whom later were to become fierce Serbian nationalists and war criminals) played a substantial role in the leftist upheaval of Western Europe, and artists and filmmakers like Dusan Makavejev were as influential as Emir Kusturica is today. Makavejev's early films, *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971) –with American poet and Fugs member Tuli Kupferberg in a side role- and *Sweet Movie* (1974) were astonishing in their erotic explicitness and fusion of (anarchist) politics and sensuality. When I visited Yugoslavia in 1972, on my first Inter-rail journey through a Europe still frozen in the simple logics of the Cold War, Marshall Tito's federation was one of the few to defy that same logic. I merely passed through Zagreb and Belgrade but spent some memorable days in Sarajevo. With its mosques and wooden houses it was a living vestige of the Ottoman past and a glimpse of "the Orient", yet clearly a crucial part of modern socialist Yugoslavia. On one of the hillsides facing the main Muslim graveyard, the big letters TITO in red overlooked the town, in unintentional ironic resemblance of the Hollywood sign on Beverly Hills.

I didn't come back to Sarajevo until December 2003, when Malmö University, supported by the Nordic council of ministers, arranged a seminar in the now capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The seminar formed part of Malmö University's Master course in Communication for Development and the theme was Culture, Conflict and Reconciliation/Media for social change in the Balkan region.

We all know what happened to Yugoslavia as a consequence of the end of the Cold War. But what has not been sufficiently analyzed and debated is the crucial role that the media played in the nationalist onslaught which escalated to genocide. And one of the sad lessons of the post-Dayton reconstruction is the failed media policies of the new nation states and the international community, as analyzed by Kemal Kurspahic, former editor in chief of the Sarajevo daily *Oslobodenje*, in his book *Prime Time Crime* (2003).

Yet the tragedies of former Yugoslavia and Rwanda are the prime cases referred to in the emerging field of 'Media and Conflict', which in the last

ISSUE 2
October 2005

few years has become one of the main fields of research and practice within Communication for Development. The focus is not only on the media's obvious ability to instigate conflict –even genocide– but also and primarily on ways of using media and communication to advocate and build peace and reconciliation.

The Sarajevo seminar was also a starting point for a number of Project Works carried out by ComDev master students in the West Balkan region between 2003 and 2005. Two of them were examined earlier this year and are presented in this second issue of *Globala Tider*, with a thematical focus on the Balkans. Ulla Engberg has studied communication for development as a component of a rural development project in Topola, Serbia. Susan Kennard has made an in-depth study of the role of art in the social processes and practices of post-war Sarajevo.

We are intending to continue the exploration of the Balkans and we wish to extend the regional focus to include Turkey and the East Mediterranean –the former Ottoman Empire. The next Communication for Development seminar in the context of Malmö University's Master course will take place in Istanbul 27–31 October, in the form of the workshop "Towards a New Balkan Cultural Studies", co-arranged by Malmö University, Istanbul Bilgi University and City University of London, and supported by the Swedish General Consulate in Istanbul. The workshop will gather scholars and artists from the region and elsewhere to address the new cultural dynamics of Europe and, possibly, draw the outlines for a new interdisciplinary area of study. The core objective is to establish, if not a new academic field, then a new terrain of academic debate and exchange. Or, in the words of the seminar's co-coordinator, Kevin Robins: "Our proposition is intentionally counter-intuitive and intellectually provocative. We believe that a key resource for thinking about transnational and transcultural developments in Europe can be found in Balkan history and experiences. The often demonized Balkans are taken as a cognitive device to re-think European Cultural and Media Studies".

This issue of *Globala Tider* connects to the Istanbul workshop, with key contributions by some of its participants. Maja Povrzanovic-Frykman explores the Balkan predicaments of ethnicity, violence and place, with a focus on Croatia and Croatian immigrants in Sweden. Anders Hoeg-Hansen writes on "the memory problem", discussing the cases of Holocaust and war memorials in Germany, a theme which certainly has relevance to recently war-struck West Balkan region and also to Turkey, where the Armenian holocaust of the crumbling Ottoman Empire remains a sensitive "non-issue" after a hundred years of defiant denial. The workshop in Istanbul is also coinciding with the 9th Istanbul International Biennial and Art's connection to remembrance, investigation and social change is a theme that we wish to explore within the ComDev agenda. In this issue Nikos Papastergiadis, Willy Brandt professor at Malmö University during the first half of 2005, addresses the role of "art in the age of siege" and proposes ethical alternatives to the mainstream political discourse.

You may of course still ask yourself what “New Balkan Cultural Studies” has to do with Communication for Development. There are many answers to that question. Firstly, culture and media analysis forms a key part in the ComDev curriculum at Malmö University. Secondly, we are deliberately trying to move away from the traditional division of the world in developed and developing countries, First and Third world, and making the globalizing, transnational and transcultural processes a focus of our interest. Europe, and not least its borders with neighbouring regions, becomes a very interesting case in that respect. The Balkans should not only be seen as a regional denomination, but also as a conceptual figure with further cultural and political implications and a certain resemblance with another key and complex concept: the Orient. Thirdly, we are also intent on exploring ways of combining artistic and academic research as part of rethinking ComDev methodology and practice. Workshop participants Zelimir Zilnik and Adela Peeva have very much to contribute in this respect. As has the groundbreaking “videoletters” project by filmmakers Eric Van der Broek and Katarina Rejger, which is portrayed in this issue.

We are confident that the combined workshop and seminar in Istanbul, like the one in Sarajevo, will be the starting-point for many new Project Works in the extended Balkan region, some of which will be presented in future issues of Globala Tider. Enjoy reading and welcome to contact us with reflections and suggestions!

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2005-10-11

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FLORENGHEL(AT)GMAIL.COM
ISSN 1654-7985